



Building Wholehearted Disciples of Jesus

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**America: God Shed His Grace On Thee**

**Part 2: The Puritans**

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# The Puritans

## Introduction:

- On a narrow strip of the northern California coastline grow the largest living things on the earth...the mighty Redwoods.
- I have visited the Muir Woods and seen these mighty trees.
- Some of these trees are over 350 feet tall, and more than 60 feet in circumference.
- The California Redwoods make me think of the Puritans, another breed of giants who were the great foundation layers of our country.
- From the mid 1600's through the late 1700's they were the giants of our nation in systematic theology, historical understanding, and entrepreneurial vision.
- It was the Puritans that gave us:
  - The source documents for the Declaration of Independence
  - The Protestant Work Ethic
  - The Christian home
  - Integrity in the work place
- As the Redwoods attract the eye with their enormous heights and size, so the Puritans shine before us as a kind of beacon light of maturity and holiness that we so desperately need today.
- There is a 33 mile road that I have traveled winding through the Redwood forest that is fittingly called the "Avenue of the Giants" I would like to take us on a little ride today through the "avenue of the giants" as we study the Puritans.

**Matthew 5:14 “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. 16 Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**

As we discussed last week, a candle had been lit by the Plymouth Colony. The Separatists had made a mark for true biblical Christianity in Cape Cod.

But what about candles in the old world? The white-hot flames of the Reformation were beginning to flicker in England. The reformationists in the Church of England, were being felt. Pressure from within the government was pushing the Puritans out.

### **Who were these Puritans?**

The modern stereotype of the Puritans is one of being blue-nosed killjoys in tall black hats; a somber sin-obsessed, witch hunting bigots, which one modern author writes, “...**whose main occupation was to prevent each other from having fun and whose sole virtue lay in their furniture.**”

- Such books as the *Scarlet Letter* and Arthur Miller’s play about the Salem Witch Trials, called *The Crucible*, carried an image of the Puritans as a people preoccupied with sin and guilt.

There is no doubt that the Puritans took sin seriously, far more seriously than we do today, but they had a good reason. They knew that success or failure in the new colony would be based on God’s favor or blessing. So success hung in the balance and sin could bring utter failure.

“Puritan” as a name, was mud from the start. Coined in the early 1560’s, it was always a satirical smear implying peevishness, censorship, conceit, and a measure of hypocrisy.

The English did not want their church revived! The king and the aristocracy enjoyed a powerless, helpless church that cowered to anything the king said. They didn’t want renewal and they certainly didn’t want the Puritans around.

But in America, the Puritans gave us so much. Like a Fresco of Michelangelo in the Sistine Chapel being cleaned, the mud of modern writers is being cleaned off, and we are seeing a beautiful mosaic of who the Puritans were.

In my opinion the main thing we can learn from the Puritans is that they were **mature**.

Jl Packer writes:

***Maturity is a compound of wisdom, goodwill, resilience, and creativity. The Puritans exemplified maturity; we don't. We are spiritual dwarfs. They were great souls serving a great God. In them clear headed passion and warm hearted compassion combined. Visionary and practical, idealistic and realistic too, goal-oriented and methodical, they were great believers, great hoppers, great doers, and great sufferers.***

- Puritanism was at its heart a spiritual movement passionately concerned with God and godliness.
- It began in England with William Tyndale, the Bible translator, who was a contemporary of Luther. Into it's making went:
  1. Tyndale's reforming Biblicism
  2. John Bradford's piety of the heart
  3. John Knox's zeal for God's honor in the national churches
  4. John Hooper's passion for pastoral competence
  5. Richard Baxter's commitment to practical teaching

But at the heart of Puritanism was a quest for Revival!

1. They did not call it revival, but "reformation"
2. Quote p. 28 Jl Packer, "Quest for Godliness":

**Puritanism was essentially a movement for church reform, pastoral renewal, and evangelism and spiritual revival; and in addition—in deed, as a direct expression of its zeal for God’s honour—it was a world-view, a total Christian philosophy, in intellectual terms a Protestantised and updated medievalism, and in terms of spirituality a reformed monasticism outside the cloister and away from monkish vows. The Puritan goal was to complete what England’s Reformation began; to finish reshaping Anglican worship, to introduce effective church discipline into Anglican parishes, to establish righteousness in the political, domestic, and socio-economic fields, and to convert all Englishmen to a vigorous evangelical faith.**

The Puritan Movement was gaining momentum:

- o This radical life changing experience was being shared all over the countryside and courtroom.
- o The Church of England, enslaved to tradition, dead orthodoxy, and a pastorate that was more concerned with a pay check than a heart check.
- o The Puritans wanted to purify the church from within.
- o They condemned the Separatists for leaving the church and fleeing to America.
- o But the Puritans faced a dilemma, the same dilemma that new believers face today ... Do they stay in lifeless churches and try to reform them ... or leave to start more powerful independent churches?
- o The Puritans were despised, but not hated as much as the Separatists.
- o Here was the core difference between the Puritans and Pilgrims: God was still leading the Puritans to the place where the Separatists had already arrived. The Puritans had more to lose than the Pilgrims. The Pilgrims largely came from the

working classes, many of the Puritans came from the Ruling Classes.

- o The Puritans had more of everything, except one thing ... compassion. The Separatists had learned compassion from suffering, and the Puritans were learning it.
- o As long as James I had been king (1603-25), the persecution had been bearable, since the Archbishop of Canterbury had been sympathetic to the Puritans.

But the situation changed dramatically under Charles I, 1625-1649.

- No sooner had he made William Laud the Bishop of London in 1628, than Laud presented the king with a list of English clergy. Laud became known as "the enforcer." Behind each name was an O or a P. If Orthodox, they were in line for promotion; if Puritan, they were marked for suppression.
- They insisted that the Puritans conform to religious practices that they abhorred, removing their ministers from office and threatening them with "extirpation from the earth" if they did not fall in line.
- Zealous Puritan laymen received savage punishments.
  - o Ex. For example, in 1630 a man was sentenced to life imprisonment, had his property confiscated, his nose slit, an ear cut off, and his forehead branded "S.S." (sower of sedition).

**To separate or not to separate? The question grew into a startling alternative. What about America? Why not a settlement of Puritans there?**

- o It would cost them everything! Their estates, their families, and possibly their very lives!
- o A new Jerusalem on earth? The building of the kingdom of God on earth? They began to believe it was God's will and plan.

- o **But the exodus out of Egypt needed a Moses, and a Moses was available...in the man of John Winthrop.**

## **John Winthrop**

- One of the most dedicated Puritans in England at the time was John Winthrop.
- Cambridge born and owning a sizable estate in Suffolk, Winthrop was an attorney in the Court of Wards.

He penned these words in 1612, at the age of 24 (p. 149, “Light and Glory”):

**I desire to make it one of my chief petitions to have that grace to be poor in spirit. I will ever walk humbly before my God, and meekly, mildly, and gently towards all men.... I do resolve first to give myself—my life, my wits, my health, my wealth—to the service of my God and Saviour who, by giving Himself for me**

**O Lord...Thou assurest my heart that I am in a right course, even the narrow way that leads to heaven. Thou tellest me, and all experience tells me, that in this way there is least company, and those who do walk openly in this way shall be despised, pointed at, hated by the world made a byword, reviled, slandered, rebuked, made a gazing stock.**

- o John Winthrop decided it was God’s calling to leave England. His reasons he wrote in his journal: (p. 155 “Light and Glory”)

***[It would be] a service to the Church of great consequence to carry the Gospel into those parts of the world.... All other Churches of Europe are brought to dissolution...and who knows but that God hath provided this place to be a refuge for many whom He means to save out of the general calamity. [La Rochelle, the seaport bastion in which the French Huguenots and held out for two years, had just fallen to Cardinal Richelieu, and in Germany, Wallenstein was pulverizing the armies of the Protestants.]***

***What He hath planted, He will maintain. Every plantation His right hand hath not planted shall be rooted up, but His own plantation shall prosper and flourish. When He promiseth peace and safety, what enemies shall be able to make the promise of God of none effect? Neglect not walls and bulwarks and fortifications for your own defense, but ever the name of the Lord be your strong tower, and the word of His promise the rock of your refuge. His word that made heaven and earth will no fail, till heaven and earth be no more.***

## **Salem**

- After 72 days, the *Arbella* arrived in the harbor of Salem.
- It was far from a pretty sight. Where were the people that had come over a little over a year before?
- Winthrop soon learned that of over 200 settlers who had come in the past two years, only 85 were still alive. Over 80 had died while the rest had quit and gone home.
- This was looking as bad as Jamestown! The people were disunified, starving, and quitting!
- Winthrop spent the night on the *Arbella* and prayed for wisdom.
- God was using the situation just as he had with the Pilgrims. Just as God had led William Bradford to compile the “Mayflower Compact” before setting foot at Plymouth, now John Winthrop would write what would become one of the great documents in the founding of our nation ...
- John Winthrop realized that if this colony was going to be successful, the key was love! Love for God and love for each other!
  - John Winthrop might have opened his Bible and read Matthew 22:35-40.



- Winthrop wrote “A Model for Christian Charity” which became the guideline for future constitutional covenants of the colonies (p. 161-2 in “Light and Glory”):

**This love among Christians is a real thing, not imaginary...as absolutely necessary to the [well] being of the Body of Christ, as the sinews and other ligaments of a natural body are to the [well] being of that body.... We are a company, professing ourselves fellow members of Christ, [and thus] we ought to account ourselves knit together by this bond of love....**

- Then came the heart of his vision:

**Continued...**

**Now the only way to avoid this shipwreck and to provide for our posterity, is to follow the counsel of Micah, to do justly, to love mercy, to walk humbly with our God. For this end, we must be knit together in this work as on man.... We must hold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make on another's condition our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the work, as members of the same body. So shall we keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.... We shall find that the God of Israel is among us, when then of us shall be able to resist a thousand of our enemies, when He shall make us a praise and glory, that men of succeeding plantations shall say, 'The Lord make it like that of New England.' For we must consider that we shall be as a City upon a Hill....**

- Winthrop was able to turn the faltering, crumbling colony around...
- Quote p. 166 “Light and Glory”

- o Winthrop was able to turn the faltering, crumbling colony around ...
- o Peter Marshall wrote ...

***Without doubt, a miracle took place upon Winthrop's arrival: a nearly dead colony was resurrected. And from all reports, God's single instrument in this resurrection was John Winthrop. Cotton Mather would refer to Winthrop as Nehemias Americanus — in reference to the Old Testament leader who had brought the Israelites back from their Babylonian exile to the Promised Land, and had directed the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem. But more important, Nehemiah had inspired them to resume their covenant with God. —Peter Marshall***

Another seventeenth-century report, quoted by modern Yale historian, Edmund Mogan, in his bibliography of Winthrop, said:

***[So soon] as Mr. Winthrop was landed, perceiving what misery was like to ensue through their idleness, he presently fell to work with his own hands, and thereby so encouraged the rest that there was not an idle person then to be found in the whole plantation. And whereas the Indians said they [the newcomers] would shortly return as fast as they came. Now they admired to see in what short time they had housed themselves and planted corn sufficient for their subsistence.***

- As the 1630's arrived, Puritan communities were flourishing all over the Northeastern seaboard of America.

- This was the beginning of “The Great Migration” which lasted for the next 16 years and saw more than 20,000 Puritans embark for New England
- If time would allow we could talk about the Great Awakening, but let us turn to the foundations the Puritans laid in our land that we can still learn from.

## **What can be Learned from the Puritans?**

### **1. The Integration of God and His Love into our Daily Lives**

- a. The banner over everything was “holiness unto the Lord.” They really believed in Matthew 22 and Mark 12→love God with your whole heart and love thy neighbor.
- b. There was no distinction between sacred and secular; Sunday and the other 6 days of the week.
- c. This integration might be termed “integrity” which means “wholeness,” which means that the private and public are consistent, the same.
- d. They really believed that all work was worship! This is where we originally got the term “protestant work ethic.” A belief that when you work you are working for God just as much as when you sing songs at church. Work is worship unto the Lord!
- e. Puritan craftsman were the best. Puritan lawyers were known to be the most prepared and articulate.

### **2. The Depth of Commitment to the Preaching of God’s Word**

- a. For the Puritan’s experiencing God through the Bible was the most important part of their lives.

- b. Jesus Christ was central to everything; The Bible was supreme, and the preaching of the Gospel and The Word of God was the cornerstone of everything.
- c. Quote Packer, p. 37

***The essential thing in understanding the Puritans was that they were preachers before they were anything else.... Into whatever efforts they were led in their attempts to reform the world through the Church, and however these efforts were frustrated by the leaders of the Church, what bound them together, undergirded their striving, and gave them the dynamic to persist was their consciousness that they were called to preach the Gospel.***

- d. All of the Puritan Magistrates in the early colonies used the Bible for law and justice matters.
- e. Puritans practiced meditation and systematic study of God's Word better than anyone at the time.
- f. At the center of Puritan worship services was the preaching of the Word.
- g. The Puritans gave America a deep commitment that the rule for all holiness came from God's Word.

### **3. The Puritans gave us a Passion for Effective Action**

- a. The Puritans were not "dreamy"! They had no time for daydreaming, idleness or passiveness.
- b. They were strong men of action-crusading activists without a jolt of self reliance; workers of God who depended utterly on God to work in and through them.
- c. Oliver Cromwell, a Puritan, great English statesman and soldier, made strong prayers before battle.

- d. The Puritans prayed long and strong prayers before they worked. They prayed long and strong prayers for a holy New England.

#### 4. The Puritans gave us a Stable Family Life

- a. The Puritans created the Christian family in the English speaking world.
- b. The Puritan ethic of marriage was to look not for a partner whom you do love, but rather for one whom you can love steadily as your best friend for life.
- c. The Puritan ethic of home life was based on maintaining order, courtesy, and family worship.
- d. It was in the home that the Puritan layman practiced his faith with evangelism and ministry.
- e. Geree wrote, ***“His(the Puritan) family he endeavored to make a church...laboring that those that were born in it, might be born again to God.”***
- f. Puritan preachers made much of Proverbs 5:18-19, “May you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful doe, a graceful deer...may you be captivated by her love.”
- g. They believed that Christ was the Head of the Home and the Man the leader of his family. Puritan men took seriously their role as leaders of their homes.
- h. The idea of the Family bible came largely from the Puritans: daily prayer and daily Bible reading was customary.

## 5. The Puritans gave us an ideal for Church Renewal

- a. Renewal was not a word they used, but they spoke of “reformation.”
- b. The Puritans believed that the church needed to be renewed to a passionate commitment to Christ.
- c. The Puritans wanted to see a church full of affection for the Lord Jesus Christ and commitment to God’s Holy Word.
- d. Without disorder and unseemly experiences, the Puritans believed many in the church were not really converted yet. For if they were truly converted their lives would show it.
- e. Quote Packer p. 36 “Quest for Godliness”

***Revival I define as a work of God by his Spirit through his word bringing the spiritually dead to living faith in Christ and renewing the inner life of Christians who have grown slack and sleepy. In revival God makes old things new, giving new power to law and gospel and new spiritual awareness to those whose hearts and consciences had been blind, hard and cold. Revival thus animated or reanimates the churches and Christians groups to make a spiritual and moral impact on communities.***